



Japan in World History

by James L. Huffman

James L. Huffman is a Professor of History Emeritus at Wittenberg University. He is the author of several books on Japanese history including *Japan in World History*, *A Yankee in Meiji Japan: The Crusading Journalist Edward H. House*, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* and is the editor of *Modern Japan: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture and Nationalism*. This excerpt is from his most recent book *Japan in World History*. In this short piece Huffman traces the development of new forms of political and social control under the Tokugawa Shogunate. The shogunate was started by Tokugawa Ieyasu who consolidated power and began limiting the autonomy of the *daimyōs* in the early 1600s.

Secondary Source:

Despite the many threats, the Tokugawa succeeded in establishing a stable state. The contrast between their world and that of the **sengoku** years was great. Two and a half centuries of peace replaced endemic warfare. The administrative capital shifted to the Tokugawa home base of Edo. Warring *daimyōs* domains gave way to an **intricate** structure that divided power between the center and the **peripheries**. Whereas Japan excluded foreigners more systematically than ever before, it became more fully integrated into the global world. These changes were more evolutionary than revolutionary, because Ieyasu's goal was to keep rivals in check rather than to **eradicate** enemies or secure absolute power over the domains of individual *daimyō*. Nevertheless, by the mid-1600s he and his successors had created the most all-encompassing **administrative structure** Japan had ever known, a structure that allowed roughly 250 domains (called *han* after the early 1700s) to coexist peacefully for a quarter of a millennium, while commerce and culture developed dramatically.

The first goal of the Tokugawa government was to maintain peace. More interested in order than innovation, Ieyasu and his followers showed little interest in developing nationwide tax, military, or judicial systems but endeavored instead to ensure their own **ascendancy** within a stable, relatively decentralized system. To that end, they left the emperors on the throne in Kyoto, assuring their material well-being while insisting that Kyoto follow the Tokugawa will. They retained the traditional religious institutions but turned temples into census-taking branches of the government.

Glossary:

sengoku: a period in history marked by social upheaval, political intrigue **and** near-constant military conflict

intricate: complex

peripheries: areas outside political and/or economic power

eradicate: destroy

administrative structure: organization of officials who run the day-to-day aspects of government

ascendancy: position of dominant power

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And they devised an administrative structure that used old names—shogun and **bakufu**—to invoke an aura of antiquity and legitimacy yet created new mechanisms designed to give each daimyō autonomy in his own domain while Edo administered Tokugawa lands and handled regime-wide duties such as the supervision of international relations and the maintenance of highways, mines, and mints.

Scholars call the system bakuhan because of the balance it maintained between the Edo bakufu and the regional **han**. The Tokugawa retained the right to eradicate or relocate daimyō, but they never considered wiping out their main rivals, and after an initial period of reorganization and consolidation, they left most domains intact. Each han was permitted to maintain its own military and tax systems and to make its own laws, as long as it followed certain rules, which included securing Edo's permission for daimyō family marriages and providing monetary and labor support for Edo projects such as palace construction and flood prevention. The result was that regional Japan experienced significant growth and diversity, while Ieyasu's descendants got the stability they sought.

The most effective-and interesting-means of assuring daimyō cooperation was the **sankin kōtai** or alternate attendance system, which by 1635 required lords to leave their wives and children in Edo permanently, as hostages, and to spend alternating periods (usually a year) there themselves, assisting the shogun. This system was effective as a control technique, keeping lords away from their han half the time and burdening them with the expenses of maintaining large residential compounds in Edo and making regular trips with hundreds of retainers to and from the capital. Its unanticipated impact in stimulating national development was equally important. The **ceaseless** travel of hundreds of daimyō contingents required a more extensive nationwide network than ever of well-maintained highways and towns for lodging, eating, and entertainment. The intermingling of the han elites in Edo, where they competed for prestige and status, created nationwide fashions and tastes. The fact that nearly all daimyō grew up in Edo, as part of the hostage system, intensified the growing sense of a common culture.

That sense was also encouraged by the bakufu's efforts to create a unified ideology and to handle foreign affairs at the national level. The regime used religion as a support for the

bakufu: Shogun's government

han: estate of a daimyō in the Edo period

sankin-kōtai: policy of the Tokugawa to strengthen central control over the daimyōs

ceaseless: unending

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